



RTCA Program History

The origin of the RTCA program can be traced back to the inception of the National Park Service.

The National Park Service, 1916 – President Woodrow Wilson signed the act that officially created the National Park Service, a new federal bureau in the Department of Interior. According to the National Park Service Organic Act, 16 U.S.C.1., the National Park Service works:

"...to promote and regulate the use of the...national parks...which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

Part of the National Park Service mission states that:

"The Park Service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world."

To achieve this mission, the National Park Service adheres to the following guiding principles:

"Productive Partnerships: Collaborating with federal, state, tribal, and local governments, private organizations, and businesses to work toward common goals.

Citizen Involvement: Providing opportunities for citizens to participate in the decisions and actions of the National Park Service.

Shared Capabilities: Sharing technical information and expertise with public and private land managers."

The Outdoor Recreation Act, 1963 – The Outdoor Recreation Act (ORA) 16 U.S.C. 4601 – 4601-3, Public Law 88-29, authorized the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance program to fulfill the outdoor recreation and conservation mission of the National Park Service. ORA states that:

"Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Congress finds and declares it to be desirable that all American people of present and future generations be assured adequate outdoor recreation resources, and that it is desirable for all levels of government and private interests to take prompt and coordinated action to the extent practicable without diminishing or affecting their respective powers and functions to conserve, develop, and utilize such resources for the benefit and enjoyment of the American people."

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, 1968 – The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act 16 U.S.C. 1271-1287 as amended Public Law 90-542, was established and states in section 11(b)(1) that:

“..the Secretary of the Interior, the Secretary of Agriculture, or the head of any other Federal agency, shall assist, advise, and cooperate with States or their political subdivisions, landowners, private organizations, or individuals to plan, protect, and manage river resources. Such assistance, advice and cooperation may be through written agreements or otherwise. This authority applies within or outside a federally administered area and applies to rivers which are components of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System and to other rivers.”

The National Trails System Act, 1968 – The National Trails System Act U.S.C. 1241 as amended, Public Law 90-543, became law and according to sections 2(c), 8(a), and 11(a) that:

“The Congress recognizes the valuable contributions that volunteers and private, nonprofit trail groups have made to the development and maintenance of the Nation's trails. In recognition of these contributions, it is further the purpose of this Act to encourage and assist volunteer citizen involvement in the planning, development, maintenance, and management, where appropriate, of trails.”

Following these directives, the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program was established with a mission to:

“...implement the natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation mission of the National Park Service in communities across America and to assist community-led natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation initiatives. RTCA staff provide guidance to communities so they can conserve waterways, preserve open space, and develop trails and greenways.”